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*Planning Bulletin*

C H E S T E R C O U N T Y P L A N N I N G C O M M I S S I O N

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Selecting

&

Working  
with  
Professional  
Consultants





BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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# Introduction

Professional consultants have experience and knowledge that can benefit municipalities in several ways. A good consultant will be efficient because he or she knows how to manage a project and is thorough because of his or her training and skill. While some consultants are generalists who have a working knowledge in several areas, e.g. planning, engineering and law, municipal government has become sufficiently complex to require the use of several consultants with extensive knowledge in each discipline. For land use and planning issues, municipalities typically use several types of consultants: municipal planners, engineers, architects, landscape architects, and attorneys.

This Planning Bulletin is specifically designed to help municipalities cultivate better relationships with consultants and ultimately create innovative and comprehensive products, by offering guidance to help municipalities select and work with consultants. The focus in this bulletin is on selecting and working with a community and land use planner, however, municipal officials may apply these techniques when hiring any type of consultant.

Consultants play a greater role in Chester County municipalities today than ever before, in part due to County grant programs. The Board of Commissioners of Chester County established the Vision Partnership Program (VPP) in 1996 to promote cooperation between local and County governments to implement *Landscapes*, the County's comprehensive policy plan. Projects available through *Landscapes*, such as comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, subdivision and land development ordinances or official maps, require a professional community and land use consultant. These projects take an average one to two years to complete and call for expertise in various disciplines.

(For more information on VPP projects, see the Tier I Plan Consistency or Tier II Plan Implementation Grant Manuals, as amended, available through the Chester County Planning Commission, or on the Planning Commission's Web site: [www.chesco.org/planning](http://www.chesco.org/planning) click on CCPC grant programs).

# Selecting a Consultant

## Requests for Qualifications (RFQ)

Once the municipality decides that it needs to hire a professional planning consultant and determines what type of product/service it needs, (See Appendix 1, steps 1-5) the governing body can begin the hiring process. Planning services do not require a “bid” process. Municipalities usually go about the hiring process in one of two ways. Municipal officials may have a “short list” of potential consultants compiled by word-of-mouth, or perhaps they recently worked with a consultant and were happy with the product and want to work with him or her again. However, not every municipality is in that position, and therefore, municipalities may begin the overall selection process by sending out Requests for Qualifications (RFQ) to determine which consultants have sufficient applicable experience to warrant further consideration.

The RFQ is a tool that municipal officials use to request from several candidates a statement outlining their specialties, experience with similar projects, familiarity with the area, abilities, and interests. The statements include relatively little information about the specific project, except perhaps a few words about the project’s general parameters. Most consultants have pre-printed documents used for marketing purposes, and can provide statements quickly and inexpensively.

## Contents of Requests for Qualifications

RFQs should require a consultant to outline their expertise, as well as available personnel to work on the project including title, experience, and length of employment with the firm. In addition, the RFQ should request a recent list of references for whom similar work was performed and state that the municipality intends to contact these references. (See Appendix 2 for a sample RFQ.)

After reviewing the consultant statements, municipal officials can select a few that have the appropriate qualifications, experience, and interest and ask these candidates to either prepare independent proposals or respond to a subsequent request for proposal.

Under the VPP grant program, planning consultants must meet certain municipal planning criteria in order to be eligible to work with a municipality on a VPP funded project. However, municipalities may apply additional criteria. (See Appendix 4 for the basic criteria for VPP project planners.)

## Requests for Proposal (RFP)

When municipal officials have identified a list of potential consultants, they may begin the selection process by sending a Request for Proposal (RFP) to as many on the list as they choose. An RFP is a tool that describes the professional service(s) the municipality desires, and invites selected consultants to submit project proposals.

The RFP should help consultants submit proposals that directly address the municipality’s needs as well as discourage proposals from unqualified candidates. This is a formal process, and the governing body should ensure that the RFP is clear, complete, and contains enough information for a consultant to submit a complete proposal. For large projects, municipal officials will often hold a briefing meeting with the prospective consultants in addition to sending out the RFP to answer any questions the consultants may have.

In addition, it is imperative that municipal officials send the same RFP to all prospective candidates, as this will make for comparable proposals and easier evaluation. The municipality

should allow adequate time for consultants to prepare well-reasoned proposals; one month is a good rule of thumb. The consultants may need more time if the project is particularly complicated or unusual.

A municipality may enlist a professional planner to help prepare the RFP and assist in the selection process. This planner is usually familiar with the particular characteristics and needs of the municipality, but would not be chosen to do the actual study due to a conflict of interest, inadequate staff time, or some other reason. The use of a planner in this limited capacity can expedite the entire process, and help ensure that the municipality receives the kind of proposals it desires.

### **Contents of Requests for Proposals**

The RFP includes six basic components: a cover page; an introduction; a project overview; a scope of services; the evaluation criteria; and a request for a resume from the consulting team members assigned to the project. The RFP should include within these components: the project objectives; a brief community background summary; request for sample documents; references and fee information. (See Appendix 3 for specific details of what to include in the RFP).

### **Evaluating Consultants and Proposals**

Once the municipality receives consultant proposals in response to the RFPs, the municipality should form a selection committee from the project taskforce to evaluate and interview the candidates. It is appropriate to include an elected official on the selection team. The selection committee should look closely at the proposed approach and understanding of and sensitivity to the municipality's character throughout the proposal.

It is helpful to apply a set of objective criteria, displayed in the sample matrix [on page five](#), to all proposals to help evaluate each response. The selection committee may assign points to each criterion in order to score each candidate. The committee should consider the consultant with the most points as the primary candidate.

Generally, the selection committee evaluations involve:

- Evaluating the proposals
- Evaluating the consultants
- Interviewing the best candidates
- Checking references
- Reviewing samples of work

#### **• Evaluating the proposals**

Every consultant has a unique style and area of expertise and the proposals will most likely reflect their styles. Some consultants have very traditional ideas while others think “outside of the box.” The selection committee should look at each proposal and determine if the consultant understood and addressed the needs and issues outlined in the RFP, and took the community's character into consideration. The municipality should look for well-organized, complete, and clear responses. A consultant who submits a poorly organized or unclear proposal is unlikely to complete a well-prepared final product. It is probable however, that despite how well-written a proposal is, it will require revision after the briefing meeting or interview.

#### **• Evaluating the consultants**

In addition to the firm, the municipality is selecting the project planner. The municipality should require in the RFP the project manager's name and resume, and the hours the manager would work directly on the project. The municipality should ask about other staff mem-

bers' abilities and the consultant should identify the people responsible for which parts of the project and whether or not the project manager oversees all work product.

Depending on the project, it may be important that the consultant have some familiarity with the municipality. However, the municipality should not necessarily disqualify a consultant because he or she is unfamiliar with the community and must spend some portion of the project budget acclimating him or herself. Consultants from outside the area often bring different perspectives that outweigh the temporary drawbacks of not being immediately familiar with the area.

- **Interviewing the best candidates**

The RFP should state whether the selection committee may interview a "short list" of prospective consultants to present their proposal. In addition, the committee should indicate in the RFP if they want to interview the entire proposed project staff before they choose the final firm. Interviews can help them determine whether the consultant is proficient at public speaking and can properly organize his or her presentation. It also gives the committee some idea as to whether the consultant's personality is compatible with the taskforce members.

The selection committee must prepare before the interview and decide who will ask what questions.

Ideally, the selection committee will unanimously recommend a consultant. A split decision will not promote harmony and may make it more difficult for the consultant to work with the entire taskforce. It is critical that the entire project taskforce discuss its expectations for the project. If the taskforce has unrealistic expectations for the project, then the taskforce will be unsatisfied with whatever the consultant produces.

- **Checking references**

A consultant will provide the names of clients who are satisfied with the consultant's work, however, the municipality should ask questions related to performance, product quality, and the consultant-taskforce relationship.

- **Reviewing samples of work**

The municipality should also request from each candidate samples of similar, recently prepared projects. (They should include provisions for the return of these documents.) Municipal officials should remember that many desktop publishing programs can create very visually appealing documents, but aesthetics should not overshadow the document's substance, including the writing and graphics quality. The documents should be comprehensive, yet clear and easy to understand. The graphics should be pertinent, not superfluous, and easy to interpret. Look for "canned" or "off-the-shelf" materials and ask why they used such materials.

Occasionally, two or more consultants who possess different skills will submit a joint proposal for large or complex projects. A municipality should determine which one is the primary consultant and then contract with that consultant. Billing and payments through one consultant is also more convenient and reliable. However, it is possible for the primary consultant to subcontract with the other consultant, which will allow the municipality to receive all benefits with fewer complications. The lead consultant should take responsibility for the schedule, the scope of services, staff coordination, billing, and client contact.

**Sample Evaluation matrix–Consultant Selection**

Criteria	Consultant 1	Consultant 2	Consultant 3
Responsive to all required materials (# of points)			
Understands the needs of municipality (# of points)			
Presented innovative proposal (# of points)			
Assigned appropriately qualified staff (# of points)			
Fee schedule (# of points)			
References/experiences (# of points)			
Samples of previous applicable work (# of points)			
Other (# of points)			
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>Total:</b>

# Working with the Consultant

## Negotiating the Agreement

Municipalities should not regard proposals as “take it or leave it.” Although contract negotiation is standard business practice, the municipal officials ought to indicate the possibility of negotiations in the RFP overview. Municipal officials should negotiate with the chosen consultant on any aspect of the proposal with which the municipality is unsatisfied or unclear, including but not limited to the scope of services, fee, time frame, or allocation of staff. A consultant who resists amending a proposal without valid reasons demonstrates an unwillingness to listen to the municipality’s needs. This may signal potential problems. However, if the consultant is willing to amend the proposal, the municipality must remember that the cost may increase.

It is imperative that all the parties agree upon the scope of services prior to signing the contract. If the project proceeds without a clear scope, dissatisfaction is inevitable. The scope elements must be specific. For example, the scope must state: the required work products and delivery schedule; the project goals and objectives; administrative issues for work sessions and public meetings; whether or not the project requires additional services such as mapping or graphics; municipal responsibilities; and budget.

## Negotiating Fees

Municipalities must take particular care when evaluating and negotiating fees. A municipality should be aware of low-cost proposals compared to the other submitted proposals. A relatively low fee is not a sole reason for rejection, but it requires the municipality pay extra attention to the proposal’s details. The submission may be substantially outside the range of the others due to a misunderstanding of the scope of work, or due to a skimpy proposal that will require additional work in the future when they flesh out the details.

In addition, it is important to tie billing arrangements to delivered work products by defining clear benchmarks. Municipal officials do not want to find themselves in a situation where they have paid out most of the budget without sufficient work product in hand. If a problem arises, the municipality’s negotiating position is weaker if it has already paid out most of the money.

## Dispute Resolution

The parties may also want to include dispute resolution provisions in the agreement. The first provision should require that the parties look to the contract if a disagreement arises. Parties will often interpret a contract provision differently, or one party may think that they contracted for something for which it did not actually contract. If reviewing the contract does not resolve the issue, the dispute resolution provisions should suggest that the parties sit down, in good faith, and discuss the conflict. If the parties are unable to resolve the problems through face-to-face discussions, the dispute resolution provisions ought to encourage the parties to go to a neutral, third party mediator/arbitrator before either breaking the contract or initiating litigation.

## Signing the Contract

Once the municipality and the consultant agree on the project scope, budget, and other contract provisions, the parties are ready to enter into a formal agreement. The municipal solicitor should look over the contract before municipal officials sign it. Although municipalities may prefer to do without the extra expense, having the solicitor look over the contract may

save money and time in the future. After the contract's execution, all parties must agree to any future changes, such as time extensions, and those changes should be in writing.

## **Communicating with the Consultant**

Communication is key to a successful project. The municipality must understand that its oversight role is crucial to the project's success and that even though it has relinquished some degree of control to the consultant, it must continue to manage and participate in the project. The municipality must be willing to let the consultant perform without undermining the process by being a passive communicator. A sign that the municipality is uncomfortable with the loss of control or with the specific consultant is an unwillingness to exchange information and ideas. To aid a smooth process the parties should adhere to the following guidelines:

- The municipality should comment promptly on submitted products and expect the consultant to respond to those comments or questions. The municipality must evaluate and give constructive and candid feedback and make sure that the consultant is listening to the approval and concerns. This will solicit future project components/chapters that are in line with the desired result.
- The municipality must give the consultant updated materials that affect the work product.

There are additional ways to communicate during the production stage. The parties should consider the following:

- **Progress reports**

The agreement should state the municipality's desire for scheduled meetings and periodic progress reports. The parties could set up meetings on a monthly basis, or upon the completion of project "milestones" to ensure that the consultant is on target and schedule. The parties can negotiate whether the progress reports are formal (written reports) or informal (an in-person meeting or telephone conversation). A municipality should understand about delays that occur due to events out of the consultant's control. When the consultant or municipality realizes schedule delays, they should amend the schedule by letter.

- **Contract compliance**

The municipality should ensure it receives the professional attention, services, and materials called for in the contract. If the municipality is not satisfied with the quality of service, it should address its concerns with the consultant immediately. If the project gets off schedule, the municipality should speak with the project manager to determine if he or she is devoting adequate attention to the project. If he or she is not, it will usually become apparent in the course of routine conversations.

- **Budget**

The agreement should require the consultant to forward a monthly budgetary status report including a statement of fees billed to date and the fees that have yet to be billed to the contract. This statement can help identify contract discrepancies early in the process or point out disputes about non-contract items. For example, if the parties did not adequately address the cost of additional work or extra copies, and the costs show up on the monthly report, the parties can discuss and negotiate the costs before they become extensive.

Consultant invoices should document completed work products. A municipality should pay consultant fees when the consultant bills for delivered work product or elements of work product such as research. This means a municipality should pay only when the consultant delivers work product, not merely on a time-scheduled basis.

## **Terminating the Contract**

Once the municipality selects a consultant, and in the case of a VPP project once the parties execute the three party contract, all parties are essentially “locked in” for the duration of the project. However, it is possible and occasionally necessary to sever the consultant relationship during a project due to unforeseen circumstances. This could occur for a variety of reasons: the consultant continues to produce an inferior work product; shows an unwillingness to meet deadlines; ignores contract stipulations or funding parameters; or is not consistent with the principles of *LANDSCAPES*. Yet, this is not a decision to make lightly as terminating the services of a consultant mid-project could result in a loss of resources (time and money), and the trouble of starting over. Therefore, it is imperative that municipal officials remain diligent and deal with situations as they arise.

The consultant may also decide to sever the relationship, although this is not as likely. The municipality must realize that if taskforce members are unwilling to work together or are disrespectful to the consultant, or expect an unrealistic product then regardless of what the consultant produces, the relationship is doomed. If the relationship sours, for any of the above reasons, the municipality must take responsibility for its actions, and consider how it contributed to the declining relationship. Otherwise, the municipality is likely to repeat its mistakes with the next consultant. This is why choosing the right consult and communicating with them is so critical.

Before the relationship degenerates to a point where either one or both parties want to sever the contract, the parties should consider the dispute resolution process outlined in the agreement (See Dispute Resolution, page six).

## **Additional Vision Partnership Program Requirements**

If the project is VPP funded, municipalities should not sign a contract with a planning consultant until the County and the municipality sign the grant agreement as County conditions of the grant may have a direct impact on the municipal/consultant agreement (e.g. a change in the scope of work). The County must also approve the scope and consultant prior to the municipality and consultant signing the contract.

In addition, the Chester County Planning Commission becomes a party to the terms of the contract and must sign it. Municipalities must be aware that the County will not reimburse any work a consultant does before the County and the municipality sign the grant agreement, and all parties (the municipality, the County and the planning consultant) sign the three-party contract.

The County recommends that the municipal solicitor review the contract before municipal officials sign it.

Under the VPP the Chester County Planning Commission may perform municipal consulting services as an in-kind grant equivalent to the cash grant for similar out-sourced projects. However, if a municipality chooses to use a private consultant and the County awards a cash grant, the Planning Commission will appoint a monitor from its staff to oversee the project. The consultant is required to send the work product to the municipality and the County monitor according to the project agreement. The monitor also performs the VPP grant review prior to reimbursement which reviews the project for compliance with the contracted scope of work, consistency with *LANDSCAPES*, and any other federal, state, and County requirements. For specific details, the reader should reference either Tier I or Tier II Grants Manuals, as amended, available through the Chester County Planning Commission, or on the Planning Commission’s Web site: [www.chesco.org/planning](http://www.chesco.org/planning).

# Project Funding

Prior to requesting funds from any source, municipalities need to estimate how much funding the project requires or risk underfunding the project, and perhaps having difficulty in paying for the services. Depending on the type of agreement, the municipality may wish to include an additional amount (typically ten percent of the contract's value) to cover contingencies.

Consultants' hourly fees may contain expenses that are not always individually itemized. Consultants primarily base their fees on the number of work hours that the consulting staff is anticipated to devote to a project, plus costs for overhead, materials, travel, and profit. The cost of professional services can add up quickly.

Public funds for professional services, if available, traditionally come from three sources; federal, state and local programs. The availability, and amount of federal, and state funds can vary, and government agencies often award funds for projects that conform to particular standards and requirements. If a municipality uses federal, state or County funds, the office administering the grant will require a work program prior to the award of funds, or as part of the application process. In some cases, therefore, a municipality would need to prepare the work program prior to securing funds for the work.

Current potential funding sources include:

- **Federal funding**

Currently, the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program supplies most federal funding for local projects. If a municipality is eligible and uses the funds, the municipality must comply with various requirements intended to ensure the proper administration of the program, prohibit discrimination, etc. The government allocates the CDBG funds on a competitive basis, and evidence of a substantial local contribution to the total project cost may improve the chances of winning federal funding. Various eligibility requirements also apply for the use of these funds, and consultants as well as municipalities may need to show compliance with various regulations regarding nondiscrimination and minority hiring.

- **State funding**

The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) offers funds for planning through the Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance Planning (LUPTAP) program. The state awards grant money on a competitive basis and tends to fund multi-municipal projects or allocates money for municipalities that provide matching funds.

- **County funding**

County funding for planning projects is available for member municipalities who meet the grant eligibility criteria under the Vision Partnership Program Grant Program. (see appendix 4.)

- **Local funding**

Paying the consultant out of the municipal general fund is convenient and involves the least intergovernmental coordination and involvement. The obvious drawback is the limited dollars available from Local funds. Funds can be made to stretch farther if adjoining municipalities agree to participate in planning programs on a regional basis, which can result in cost savings from economies of scale.

- **Non-profit sources**

Funds are sometimes available from private sources such as foundations, but foundations usually award these funds to non-governmental agencies. Funding will ultimately depend on the type of project. The *Directory of Pennsylvania Foundations*, published by the Triadvocates Press, lists most Pennsylvania foundations.

Municipalities can benefit, because of economy of scale, by participating in multi-municipal projects. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code allows municipalities to coordinate efforts, enabling each municipality to take advantage of planning practices that would not be as advantageous if it undertook the project individually. For instance, a rural community may be able to sell development rights to a more urban/suburban municipality and satisfy the state's fair share requirement, while maintaining its rural character.

Municipalities may also reduce the direct project costs by making use of resources that can provide information, services, or advice with no charge or at a nominal fee. The Chester County Planning Commission maintains various databases such as census data, population projections, land use data, lists of physical features, utilities, etc. In addition, the County Planning Commission supplies each municipality with a two volume community planning handbook entitled *A Toolbox for Managing Change in Chester County* which provides tools and techniques for dealing with: growth management; natural resource protection and open space; water resource management; agriculture and farmland protection; historic and cultural resources; economic development; transportation; housing; and planning program administration. The handbook serves as a guide for developing a planning program appropriate for a rural, suburban, or urban municipality.

## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1:** Selecting a Professional Consultant Checklist

**Appendix 2:** Sample Request for Qualifications (RFQ)

**Appendix 3:** What to Include in the Request for Proposal (RFP)

**Appendix 4:** Planning Consultant Qualifications



# Appendix 1

## Selecting a Professional Consultant Checklist

1. Decide whether to use a consultant: (Y/N)
  - Does current municipal staff have the expertise to perform the project?
  - Does current staff have the time?
  - Does the municipality need regional, state, or national experience for a project?
  - Does the municipality need regional, state, or national consultant to establish credibility?
  - Does the municipality need the project to be completed quickly, or in phases?
2.  Create a selection committee to hire and a taskforce to work with the consultant.
3.  (Optional) Does the municipality need to hire a separate consultant to assist in the selection process?
4. Decide on the type of professional(s):
  - Planner:
    - Land use/community
    - Environmental
    - Transportation
  - Other (licensed professional, e.g., attorney, engineer, architect)
  - Combination of skills
5. Determine level of assistance:
  - Complete assistance
  - Limited assistance:
    - Advise taskforce
    - Conduct portions of project
    - Review others' work
6. How does the municipality intend to secure funding:
  - Investigate federal: CDBG
  - Investigate state: LUPTAP
  - County: VPP grants
  - Other: grants
  - Funds budgeted by governing body
- 7a. Prepare the RFQ:
  - Cover page
  - Introduction
  - Request staff qualifications
  - Require summary of previous experience
  - List of references
  - Submittal due date
- 7b. Distribute RFQ:
  - Get list of potential consultants from:
    - Past experience
    - Other municipalities
    - Advertisements
    - Professional journals
    - Advertise

8. Prepare the RFP:

- Cover page
- Introduction
- Project overview
- Scope of services
- Evaluation criteria
- Staff assigned/qualifications
- Request sample documents
- Project fees
- List of references

9. Evaluate proposals:

- Develop criteria prior to judging responses and evaluate:
  - Provided all required material
  - Understands unique needs of municipality
  - Presented innovative proposal
  - Appropriate staff qualifications
  - Experience
  - Size of firm
  - Level of project commitment
  - Fees
  - Firm's resources
- Review work samples:
  - Understand unique municipal needs
  - Provide innovative product
- Contact references
- Conduct interviews:
  - Conduct post-interview debriefing of selection committee
  - Select finalists
- Send out "thank you for responding" letters to all consultants
- Meet to select consultant

10.  Negotiate contract:

- Scope of services
- Timeframe
- Fees
- Payment schedule
- Dispute resolution (optional)
- Solicitor reviews contract
- Award contract

11. Follow up during the work:

- Require periodic meetings
- Follow budget and work progress monthly
- Ensure continued professional attention

## Appendix 2

### Sample Request for Qualifications (RFQ)

Consulting Services Request For Professional Qualifications  
for preparation of a:

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE FOR \_\_\_\_\_  
municipality

\_\_\_\_\_ intends to update its Comprehensive Plan. Prior to the  
municipality submission of Requests for Proposals, interested consultants are invited to submit a  
statement of general qualifications. \_\_\_\_\_ anticipates utilizing  
municipality a consultant with expertise in areas of open space and environmental protection,  
growth management, transportation management, and who are also familiar with  
the local area.

The statement of qualifications may include short discussions of comprehensive plans  
that were prepared by the consultant within the past four years, available personnel  
to work on the project, their length of employment at the firm, and discussions of  
areas of staff expertise, or innovative approaches to any of the issues listed above. In  
addition, the \_\_\_\_\_ requests a recent list of references. The  
municipality \_\_\_\_\_  
municipality is not interested in reviewing specific proposals at this time.

Responses are to be submitted to \_\_\_\_\_ by  
municipal address \_\_\_\_\_  
date. The \_\_\_\_\_ may request a number of respondents  
municipality to submit specific proposals shortly after \_\_\_\_\_. Questions about this process  
date should be directed to \_\_\_\_\_.  
name



## Appendix 3

### What to Include in the Request for Proposal (RFP)

#### Cover Page

- The name and address of the municipality.
- The name of the project or study.
- A contact person.
- The date and time of pre-submission briefing meeting.
- The due date and time for the proposal.

#### Introduction

This should be a brief explanation of the municipality's goals and criteria for the project and type of service it seeks. For example, the introduction may state that a rural community is developing into a suburban area and is interested in developing growth policies that encourage the preservation of the remaining open lands. Therefore, the municipality would state that it prefers a consultant who is experienced in innovative ways to control growth and preserve open space. This should help the municipality avoid responses from consultants who do not have the proper job qualifications.

Following the introduction there should be a brief summary of the municipality's background, such as its location, demographics, including population and growth rates, dominant land uses, completed studies and mapping, and the level of expected public participation. This information is especially necessary for consultants who may be located outside the area and may be unfamiliar with the community. It may also alert the consultants to issues that the municipality itself is not aware of and enable the consultants to address those issues in their proposals.

The introduction should also contain:

- Deadline information such as date, time, and place.
- Submission information (e.g. all proposals must be in sealed envelopes and marked with the project name and delivered to the municipal building).
- Budget amount.
- Interview and selection schedule.

#### Project Overview

The project overview describes how the municipality wants to conduct the process and offers guidelines for the consultants to follow. The overview should include:

- **Pre-submission meeting**

Many municipalities hold a pre-submission meeting for prospective consultants. This is an informal meeting at which the municipal staff can explain the project in more detail and answer questions. It is a way to ensure that the consultants have an opportunity to clarify information prior to proposal submission.

- **Selection process**

Describe the interview process, and state whether the municipality wishes to interview the entire project team. State that the municipality wants to know how much work/level of oversight the project leader will have over the project. Disclose whether the candidate might have to present their proposal at the interview.

- **Combination of proposals**

A municipality may find that some proposals contain innovative approaches to certain issues while others follow a more traditional approach. If this is the case, the municipality may negotiate with the preferred candidate to develop a scope of services that includes some of the desired components from the other proposals. In order to do this the municipality must disclose its intention to do so in the RFP overview. This will alert the prospective consultants that they might prepare work that another consultant may use, without compensation for such work. Therefore, consultants uncomfortable with the possibility of another consultant using aspects of their work product can decide up front if he or she wants to participate in the project.

- **Reveal funding sources and budget**

Although there is debate about whether to disclose the budget, because consultants will set their price right at the stated dollar amount, the municipality should disclose the budget. This will let consultants know if the municipality is on target with the project's cost, or if they can work within such a budget.

- **Schedule**

Date of the award and the timetable for the project.

- **Program provisions**

The municipality's intent to negotiate aspects of the agreement. The municipality's desire for scheduled meetings and/or periodic progress reports and monthly budgetary status reports.

## **Scope of Services**

The scope of services is the substantive section, the crux of the RFP, as it lists the municipality's desired services. The scope of services should include the following:

- **A mission statement**

- **Compliance criteria**

If the project is eligible for any grant monies, list the compliance criteria that the project must follow to meet the program requirements.

- **Required services**

This tells the consultant what type and how comprehensive a product the municipality desires and, therefore, the description should be as detailed as possible. For example, a municipality should not merely indicate that the "consultant should complete an update to the zoning ordinance." The municipality should state that the consultant must update the zoning ordinance in conformance with the comprehensive plan, and include definitions, administration, zoning districts, parking standards, sign regulations, etc.

- **Public participation and meetings**

The municipality should indicate the required level of public involvement, and list the number of public meetings, public information sessions, etc., that the consultant is expected to attend.

- **Final products**

An explanation of the numbers and types of documents that the consultant must provide the municipality. For example, the municipality may require the consultant provide 25 interim drafts and 50 final copies of the zoning ordinance and map, provide one zoning map for official display, and provide an electronic copy of the document.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

State the evaluation criteria by which the municipality will choose the consultant.

- **Understanding the client's needs**

State that the municipality is looking for a consultant who understands the community and the problem(s) and that the municipality will choose whichever consultant best fits that profile.

- **Unique approach or methodology**

Indicate that the municipality is looking for a consultant who can provide a unique approach, that the consultant understands the basic strategies and is able to take the project beyond that.

- **Cost**

State that the municipality is seeking a consultant that will be able to complete the project within the budget parameters. While the municipality may be willing to negotiate the type of agreement, once the type of agreement and amount of the budget are established, the municipality will hold firm and resist budget increases.

## **Qualifications**

Request the qualifications of the:

- **Project manager**
- **Project team and company**



## **Appendix 4**

### **Planning Consultant Qualifications for VPP Projects**

Selecting a qualified planning consultant will help assure that the community's planning program is comprehensive, accurate and realistic. To that end, the following criteria are intended as minimum standards and are designed to assist municipalities with the selection of a qualified consultant and team for the Vision Partnership Program (VPP). Participating municipalities may choose more stringent criteria. However, the following minimum standards have to be met in order to qualify as an eligible professional planning consultant and team member under this grant program. The retained planning consultant must also comply with the criteria established for a professional planning consultant by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

Municipalities are encouraged to contact other municipal client references of a prospective planning consultant and select someone who is the best "fit" to complete the project and to work with the community. It is in the best interest of the community to choose someone who has the experience, knowledge, and training in the specific type of planning for the proposed program. The burden of proof should lie with the potential consultant to prove their and their team's expertise. Municipalities may contact the Chester County Planning Commission for a current list of municipal clients served by consultants that have participated under the VPP grant program.

Should the project use a professional consulting team, for each member participating on the team, there shall be submitted with the application, a resume and list of client municipalities for each member in which similar planning services were provided, along with contact names and phone numbers.

The team must have a leader who will be designated the "project planner." The project planner will be responsible for the overall supervision of the team and liaison with the various stakeholders, including the County Planning Commission. The project planner should be thoroughly versed with municipal planning programs and must meet the following requirements:

#### **Five requirements**

1. Hold a bachelor's or master's degree in planning, landscape architecture, or related field, from an accredited college or university.
2. Demonstrate a minimum of five years of professional planning work experience and proficiency in the specific field of study, with a minimum of two years experience in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This experience shall include primary responsibility, either as a project director or sole professional staff, for major planning projects, including comprehensive plans and their implementation.
3. Demonstrate experience in:
  - Developing and recommending to municipal officials public policies and programs.
  - Analyzing the broad consequences of specific actions or choices recommended.
  - Applying elements of the planning process, including opportunity definition, goal setting, identifying alternatives, implementation and evaluation.

4. Ensure that:

- The study has a direct link towards implementing a specific item within **LANDSCAPES**.
- The study observes sound planning principles and process; and
- The study results include an implementation component with specific actions, responsibilities and timeframe for completion that the municipality will undertake.

5. While not specifically required, American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) certification is highly recommended.

Finally, municipal solicitors and engineers may serve as technical reviewers of work performed by the selected consultant.

## References

Eric Damian Kelly. *Selecting and Retaining a Planning Consultant*. Planning Association Report Number 443. American Planning Association, Chicago, IL February 1993.

*How to Find (and Keep) the Best Professionals for Your Township*. Pennsylvania Township News, November 1994.

## Previous Planning Bulletins

1. Highway Priorities (1976)
2. Traffic Operation Program to Increase Capacity and Safety (1976)
3. Homeowners Associations (1979)
4. Population Projections 1980–2000 (1980)
5. Current Housing Issues (1981)
6. Subdivision Activity, 1980 (1981)
7. Census of Population and Housing, 1980 (1981)
8. Subdivision Activity, 1981 (1982)
9. Stormwater Management Practices (1982)
10. Zero Lot Line Housing (1982)
11. Census Highlights (1983)
12. Act 247 Activity, 1982 (1983)
13. Census, Sex and Age Characteristics, 1980 (1983)
14. Census, Housing Highlights, Tenure, Rent, Vacancy—1980 (1983)
15. Census, Minorities—1980 (1983)
16. Census, Income Profile—1980 (1983)
17. Census, Transportation to Work and Place of Work (1984)
18. School Closings and Building Re-use (1984)
19. Census, Occupation and Industry (1984)
20. Act 247 Activity, 1983 (1984)
21. Census, Education Profile (1984)
22. Accessory Apartments in Single Family Homes: Issues and Regulations (1984)
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24. Housing Affordability, Chester County 1983 (1984)
25. Mixed Use Zoning (1984)
26. Housing Supply Change 1970–80 (1985)
27. Community Living Arrangements (1985)

28. Population Projections 1990–2000 (1985)
29. Sliding Scale Zoning (1986)
30. Banners and Temporary Signs (1986)
31. Census of Population, Single Parent and Single Person Household, 1970–1980 Trends (1986)
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33. Wetlands (revised 2002)
34. Microwave Antennas (1987)
35. Population Projections, 1990–2010 (1988)
36. Housing Trends (1988)
37. Stream Water Quality Classifications (revised 2002)
38. MPC Act 170 Amendments, 1990 (1990)
39. Housing Costs (1990)
40. Spray Irrigation (1990)
41. Planned Residential Development (1990)
42. On-lot Sewage Management Programs (revised 2002)
43. An Introduction to Wellhead Protection for Chester County Municipalities (1991)
44. Housing Alternatives for Special Needs Groups (1992)
45. Population Projections 1995–2020 (1992)
46. Water Conserving Landscapes, Xeriscape (1993)
47. Regional Planning & Other Forms of Multi-municipal Cooperation (1994)
48. The Official Map (1994)
49. Outdoor Lighting (1994)
50. Selecting and Working with Professional Consultants (revised 2003)
51. Native Plants in the Chester County Landscape (1996)
52. Trends & Relationships Between Occupied Housing Units & School Enrollment (1996)
53. U.S. Route 30—Traffic Volume Changes Associated with the Exton Bypass (1998)
54. Individual Off-lot Sewage Systems (1998)
55. Population Projections 2005–2030 (2002)

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